

SENSITIVE CONVERSATION WITH CHILDREN: STRATEGIES FROM MOTHERS ON TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Emotionally and physically involved parents is vital in the development of a healthy mental well-being among children. However, open discussions on the topic of mental health in Malaysia remains hindered by existing cultural stigmas despite the grave repercussions it carries. This makes the communication of mental health between parent and child more complex, and influences whether mental health issues can be discussed candidly or are simply glossed over. This study aims to examine maternal experience in communicating about their children's mental health. This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to obtain meaningful data. Seven mothers between 26-53 years old with higher education qualifications were recruited via the purposeful sampling technique. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The results found that all mothers had general levels of mental health literacy but faced communication apprehension in directly addressing the topic of mental health with their children. However, they practiced authoritative parenting styles in their methods of providing support for their children. The results also show that mothers noticed improvements in their child's social functioning through their engagement efforts. The mothers handled communication barriers by expressing their concerns and offering support through other means, such as sharing relevant social media posts, practicing firm but nurturing parenting, and emphasising the importance of socialisation skills in children. This study highlights the importance of maternal engagement in the development of a healthy mental well-being among children. Therefore, it is imperative to break the stigma associated with mental health in Malaysian society in order to educate more parents on the significance of the issue and better fulfil the psychological needs of their children.

Keywords: Maternal Engagement, Mental Health, Parenting Style, Sensitive Conversation, Wellbeing.